VA, Cerner EHR deal held up after spat over interoperability definition, report says

VA Secretary Shulkin said that a recent meeting between the VA and Cerner was far from good, but the VA’s team is consulting with other IT leaders to ensure the best outcome for veterans.

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The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’ EHR contract with Cerner was set to be signed this fall, but a new report from Politico found that it’s been held up over disagreements between executives on the definition of interoperability.

VA Secretary David Shulkin, MD, selected Cerner in a no-bid contract in June to replace the agency’s legacy VistA EHR as a way to align data between the VA and the Department of Defense, which already runs on Cerner. The contract is estimated at about $10 billion or more.
While the road has been bumpy – EHR developer CliniComp has sued the government, among other delays – Shulkin has been committed to its choice in selecting Cerner for the replacement.

However, Shulkin has pushed back the expected fall deadline, as **Cerner’s definition of interoperability was too limited, covering only documents called CCDAs, or Consolidated Clinical Document Architecture.**

The meeting between VA and Cerner last month was tense, Shulkin told Politico: “To say it wasn't a good meeting would be an understatement."

Interoperability is crucial to Shulkin’s IT modernization plan. In December, the VA **released its report** on the functional requirements expected from Cerner. Not only is Cerner expected to provide a seamless platform between DoD and VA, interoperability must be far better than the industry standard.

“The Contractor is required to collaborate with VA affiliates, community partners, EHR providers, healthcare providers and vendors to advance seamless care throughout the healthcare provider market,” according to the work statement.

The goal is to enable access and data sharing, along with a security framework to support end-to-end healthcare clinical and business operations. As the VA has been leaning on its VA Choice Program, which extends covered services for veterans as a stop-gap solution for its wait-time issues, interoperability must also be possible between those private providers.

In the interim, Shulkin and his team are using the delay to work with other IT leaders, which he believes will improve outcomes for veterans.